



# City of Arlington

Administration

May 11, 2016

Chairman Tom Wheeler  
Commissioner Mignon Clyburn  
Commissioner Jessica Rosenworcel  
Commissioner Ajit Pai  
Commissioner Michael O'Rielly  
Federal Communications Commission  
445 12th Street, SW  
Washington, DC 20554

Re: *Connect America Fund*, WC Docket No. 10-90

Dear Chairman Wheeler and Commissioners Clyburn, Rosenworcel, Pai, and O'Rielly:

As the Mayor of Arlington, Washington, I am writing you to emphasize the importance of continuing to fund voice services for the most rural parts of our state. The State of Washington, like many states, have some very rural and remote areas with challenging terrains. Landline voice services remain the primary method of communications for these areas and remain vital for emergency services, particularly before, during, and in the aftermath of extreme weather events.

In 2014, a mudslide in Oso, Washington engulfed a rural neighborhood, covering approximately 1 square mile and killing 43 people. In this mountainous area, cell service is spotty at best and in most cases non-existent. Landlines are essential for continuous communications. The mudslide toppled utility poles and snapped wires, which left thousands of residents, including the entire Town of Darrington, pop. 1,362, and the Sauk-Suiattle Indian Reservation without landlines for phones, 911, emergency services, or internet.<sup>1</sup> Working alongside first responders, Frontier Communications was able to restore hardline Internet and phone services within five hours, allowing those affected to call emergency services and reach their families. To achieve this, 15 Frontier employees hand-pulled and spliced more than 14,000 feet of fiber cable to reconnect Darrington to the outside world. Restoring communication was more important than the placement of the wire, so workers pulled the cable through blackberry bushes, into ravines and up hillsides. The temporary fiber remained in place until March 5, 2015, when the final splicing of the permanent fiber optic cable occurred.

---

<sup>1</sup> See Attachment 1 – Aerial of Oso mudslide.

In all of these examples, landline telephone service was critical for emergency services, and it was vital to restore communications as quickly as possible if they were knocked out. Restoring landline service is especially important in these very rural areas because there is frequently no wireless services, and our residents rely on telephone as the primary link to emergency services. First responders rely on maintaining that connection during emergencies and ensuring that communications are restored as quickly as possible if a weather event takes down communications.

Telephone service in remote areas is also particularly important due to reverse 911. Reverse 911 (also called emergency telephone notification) allows first responders to call residents in advance of and during natural disasters to give an early warning and communicate updates. For example, reverse 911 was used in the hours after the Oso mudslide to instantaneously notify residents and communities downstream of the mudslide that the Stillaguamish River may flood. Reverse 911 is also useful with notifications during forest fires because it enables emergency responders to nearly instantaneously warn residents to evacuate if they may be in the path of a fire, which can change direction at a moment's notice.

Landline voice service remains too important of a service to emergency services in rural and remote locations to put at risk through a failure to provide adequate funding. Accordingly, we would urge the Commission to take into account the importance of emergency services, including 911 and reverse 911, in ensuring that Washington's most rural residents can continue to access voice services.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Barbara Tolbert".

Barbara Tolbert  
Mayor



Oso Mudslide; Oso, Washington

